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2. Email communication

Christa Dürscheid and Carmen Frehner

1. Introduction

With millions of emails sent every day, email has become a common mode of communication that is used by young and old. To have an email address – or even several – is something that is taken for granted; email has become as natural a communication channel as the telephone. Thus, one may assume that most readers are familiar with sending emails and with their structural elements, which include the header, the body, and an optional signature. Compared to other modes of computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC), email is considered an old mode that is gradually losing popularity as new, competing modes have sprung up. Nevertheless, email is still the most important CMC application because it is the only one with which the average Internet user is familiar. Thus, when filling in forms, for instance, it is the person's email address that is asked for and not their Skype user ID or Twitter account – a practice that is likely to persist for a while. Emails are used for various purposes, e.g., to exchange information, to submit greetings and invitations, or to send an Internet link or some digital data (ranging from simple word documents to photos and videos). Being less personal than a letter, it is a relatively unobtrusive form of communication and also encourages people who would not send letters otherwise to communicate in writing. What is more, its swift transmission makes it a preferred medium to communicate with people who are far away. While a letter would take much longer to be delivered, an email reaches its recipients in no time, no matter where they are located.

The history of email dates back to the 1970s (see Baron 2000: 223–226). Until the late 1980s, email was used primarily in governmental, business, and computer science circles; subsequently, it gained widespread popularity with the rise of Internet Service Providers such as CompuServe and AOL. It has replaced telephone calls and letter mails to a certain extent and has further created new communication niches: People send each other emails in situations in which they would not have addressed each other earlier on, and so it has become much easier to approach another person when needing assistance. Teachers, for instance, frequently receive emails from their students who ask questions about homework assignments, upcoming exams, or personal matters, inquiring about problems for which they would have found a solution without the teacher's help in earlier times. In this context, Baron (2003: 86 and 2008: 165) reports on a student who asked for further information on his research project while he was preparing his master's thesis: "Apparently his library did not have many useful sources. After presenting me a long

list of questions, he closed with ‘OK NAOMI ... I really need your information as soon as possible’”. This example clearly illustrates that the inhibition threshold to write somebody has been lowered, but it also points to another phenomenon that seems to be typical of email, namely the tendency to use a rather informal style (see section 3).

Whereas previous studies have often discussed issues dealing with the question of why people use email, this very question must be modified to inquire about the reasons behind the fact that some people *still* send letters, while in other situations they prefer email to letters. Indeed, there are some advantages of a letter over email: A letter can transport an object; the receiver might pay more attention to a letter than to an email; a letter can also be received by people who do not use the Internet. How, then, is it that people often choose email to make an appointment or discuss problems? Why would they not phone in such situations? An email does not disturb the recipients at work and permits the senders to think over their words and modify their sentences. Thus, it is not astonishing that people who work in the same office, for instance, frequently communicate via email. Another advantage is that “[email] enables people to communicate speedily the same information to many others”, as Waldvogel (2007: n.p.) points out. The interactants even get a record of the communication, which is not the case when discussing a topic over the phone.¹ In fact, email has become so popular within the business sector that people often spend hours reading and answering emails, with the result that some employers have started to reduce the time their employees are allowed to spend with email in order to save working time.

In section 2, we briefly sketch the history of email research from the 1980s until the present. In section 3, the features generally claimed to be typical of email are listed and critically discussed. We argue that there is no reason to assume a language that is unique to email and show that it is rather inaccurate to use terms such as “Netspeak”. Nevertheless, there are new communication practices when it comes to emailing – practices that influence people’s social and communicative behaviour. This particularly applies to email dialogues, which can be regarded as a typical characteristic of CMC. In this context, we also refer to the numerous style guides on the composition of emails. Section 4 focuses on theoretical approaches to CMC in general and email communication in particular: On the one hand, we describe a model which is well known in the work of German and Romance scholars, namely the orality-literacy model of Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher (1994). On the other hand, we refer to Susan Herring’s (2001, 2007) discourse analysis approach to CMC. The last section provides an outlook on the future of email; we advance the thesis that email will persist in certain areas only, while it will be replaced by more synchronous means of (online) communication in many others.

2. History of email research

As Stein (2003) points out, many linguistic and communication studies of Internet language in German are available these days. Accordingly, it is important to focus not merely on linguistic studies that have been carried out in the Anglophone area but also on available German research material. The following overview therefore provides both an overview of English studies and a description of the major German works.²

Even though linguistic research on CMC in the Anglophone area dates back to the beginning of the 1980s, it was only around 10 years later that it received serious attention by linguists and scholars, and so “CMC was still a novelty topic of research in the early 1990s” (Herring 2008: xxxv). The same is true for the German-speaking research community. The earliest CMC studies that came to be known by a broader public were published in the late 1990s; among these are Weingarten’s volume *Sprachwandel durch Computer* (‘Computer-Driven Language Change’) (1997) and Runkehl, Schlobinski, and Siever’s frequently cited book *Sprache und Kommunikation im Internet* (‘Language and Communication on the Internet’) (1998). To start with the Anglophone linguistic email research, three major names must be mentioned in this context, these being Naomi Baron, Susan Herring, and David Crystal.

a) Naomi Baron published an essay on “Computer mediated communication as a force in language change” as early as 1984, and she studied the linguistics of email more closely in her article “Letters by phone or speech by other means: The linguistics of email”, which appeared in 1998. In the latter article, she also discussed the difference between writing and speech and considered email against the background of this difference, concluding that while some features “distribute themselves neatly on the dichotomous writing/speech spectrum”, others “have mixed profiles” (Baron 1998: 155). Two years later, Baron came out with a rather comprehensive study on the history of writing technologies, a book called *Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading* (2000). *Always On* (2008) is another important study worth noting in this context. The question Baron approaches in both books is how technology is changing the way we write. She claims that “[i]n the fast-moving world of email, content is far more important than spelling and punctuation” and finds that “the line between the spoken and written language continues to fade” (Baron 2000: 259). Similarly, in her article “Why email looks like speech. Proofreading, pedagogy and public face”, which was published three years later, Baron (2003: 92) argues that “[e]mail resembles speech”, thereby, however, ignoring the fact that there is actually a wide array of text types, ranging from informal to formal, as well as a great variety of situational factors that have to be considered, both of which have a significant influence on email style. Baron (2003: 92) then points out that “writing in general has become more speech-like, thanks in part to conscious pedagogical decisions and in part to

changing social attitudes about how we present ourselves to others". To support this strong thesis, she provides a few intuitive examples concerning the United States' (henceforth U.S.) education system and social attitudes. It goes without saying that more substantiated studies are necessary to ascertain whether these supposed modifications in language use are in fact a reflex of a more general development, that is, whether it is justifiable to speak generally of a "growing American tendency for all writing to become more informal, less edited, and more personal" (Baron 2003: 88).

b) With the numerous books and articles she has edited and written on computer-mediated communication, Susan C. Herring has made a large contribution to linguistic research on email communication. She began studying CMC in 1991 (per her biographical note in Herring 2008) and continues publishing valuable research on the topic. One of her major works is the volume *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1996a), which she edited. Herring's theoretical frame in CMC is discourse analysis, an approach that was originally developed for oral communication and that has been applied to written interaction in computer-mediated discourses as well. A short overview of research on CMD (computer-mediated discourse) is given by Herring (2001). Here, she points out that social practices, communication purposes, and situational and demographic factors (e.g., social class, race, and ethnicity) have to be taken into account when analysing CMC, and she presents the main properties of CMD following these factors. In a contribution to *Language@Internet*, a journal of which she later became the editor-in-chief, she presents a CMC classification scheme that brings together relevant aspects of the technical and social context that influences discourse usages within CMC (Herring 2007). The scheme does not rely on communication modes such as email, chat, blogs, etc., but is organised in terms of clusters of features that are independent of each other but tend to combine in predictable ways. This makes the scheme highly versatile, so that it can even be applied to new communication modes that have yet to arise. Following Cherny (1999), Herring (2001, 2007) mentions an interesting difference between one-way transmission communication modes (e.g., chat) and two-way transmission communication modes (e.g., Unix talk systems): Whereas the recipients can see how the messages are typed by the senders in two-way systems, this is not the case in one-way systems. Messages are displayed on the recipients' screens only after being dispatched, which also prevents the recipients from interrupting or taking over the turn.³ According to Herring's typology, email is an example of asynchronous communication with one-way message transmission: Neither must the communication partners be logged in simultaneously, nor can they see how the other person is typing the message.

c) A frequently-cited volume on CMC is David Crystal's *Language and the Internet*, which first appeared in 2001. In this book, Crystal devotes one chapter to the language of email, in which he describes its structural elements and various lin-

guistic features and also defines the uniqueness of email. Crystal has become well known for coining the term “Netspeak” – a term which appears in many of his works, such as in the second edition of his volume *The English Language: A Guided Tour of the Language* (1988, 2002). This term is critically discussed in Dürscheid (2004), who finds that “Netspeak” as such does not exist. She argues that the different kinds of text types written online make it impossible to draw any generalising conclusions by subsuming the various linguistic features under a single terminus technicus. Another book which deals with the topic is entitled *The Language Revolution*, in which Crystal (2004: 64) points out that “[t]he public acquisition of the Internet was [besides the emergence of a global language and the phenomenon of language endangerment] the third element contributing to the revolutionary linguistic character of the 1990s, and the one where the epithet ‘revolutionary’ is easiest to justify”. It is worth mentioning that Crystal (2001: 52–59) was one of the first authors to analyse CMC in terms of Grice’s conversational maxims (see also the chapters by Herring, Heyd, and Lindholm in this volume). He argues, for instance, that Grice’s maxim of manner (“avoid obscurity of expression”) may be violated in CMC: “[t]yping, not a natural behaviour, imposes a strong pressure on the sender to be selective in what is said [...]. And selectivity in expression must lead to all kinds of in clarity” (Crystal 2001: 57–58). Indeed, it is interesting to apply the maxims to CMC in the way Crystal has done. According to Stein (2003: 160), this part is “one of the strongest and [...] most innovative facets of the book”.

There have been a number of other research articles, among which “Writing in cyberspace: A study of the uses, style and content of email” by Helen Petrie (1999) must particularly be mentioned. This study is one of the most extensive email studies quantitatively, comprising analysis of 38,000 emails. Further important works on the linguistics of email are Natalie Maynor’s article “The language of electronic mail: Written speech?” (1994), Judith Yaross Lee’s article “Charting the codes of cyberspace: A rhetoric of electronic mail” (2003), and Carmen Frehner’s volume *Email – SMS – MMS. The Linguistic Creativity of Asynchronous Discourse in the New Media Age* (2008). Frehner, like Crystal (2001), refers to Grice’s conversation maxims in her chapter about “netiquette” (2008: 41–43).

German research on email was launched by two major works, namely Janich’s (1994) “Electronic Mail – eine betriebsinterne Kommunikationsform” (‘Electronic mail – a company internal communication form’) and Günther and Wyss’s (1996) “E-Mail-Briefe – eine neue Textsorte zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit” (‘Email letters – a new text type between orality and literacy’). Janich analysed emails from within the business sector and focused on the characteristic features of email correspondence in offices, while Günther and Wyss also paid attention to private email communication. As the title of the latter work suggests, the authors assume that email corresponds to one single text type. This might have been true at the time the article was drafted; however, email has long since become multifunc-

tional with regard to its communication purposes. This is clearly demonstrated in another study by Schmitz (2002), who shows that the email corpus of just one person, consisting of 20,500 emails gathered over six years, covers almost every text type, ranging from felicitations to orders, condolences, applications, making appointments, and many others. Another important study is Pansegrau's "Dialogizität und Degrammatikalisierung in E-mails" ('Dialogism and degrammaticalisation in emails'), which was published in 1997. As one of the first articles, it discusses CMC in the light of Koch and Oesterreicher's (1994) model, which deals with the difference between orality and literacy and considers the relationship between the characteristics of written and spoken language as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (see section 4). Koch and Oesterreicher's terminology has become pivotal in German research on CMC (Dürscheid 2004); however, it is largely unknown within the Anglophone research community, having been closely discussed in this context only by Frehner (2008: 170–179), Jucker (2006: 118–120), and Landert and Jucker (2011: 1425–1428).

While most works on email have pointed out the new features that have evolved from computer-mediated communication, Elspaß (2002) has provoked with a publication bearing the title "Alter Wein und neue Schläuche?" ('Old wine and new skins?'), in which he argues that what has been considered new in CMC has, in fact, always existed in private written correspondence (Elspaß 2002: 7). This article contradicts all those studies which claim that some form of language change has accompanied the use of the new media (e.g., Weingarten 1997), stating that the only thing that has changed is the users' attitude towards the norms of language usage, not the language use itself. Elspaß (2002) explains that at the end of the 19th century, German emigrants to the U.S. used a similar speech-like style in letters they sent to the "old world", with the difference that these people, farmers and craftsmen alike, were often not able to do any better because they were ignorant of the norms of writing, whereas most of the writers nowadays are aware of the rules and regulations, but do not follow them. Elspaß further notes that while oral features in written language have been broadly treated in linguistic research of recent years, they were largely ignored in scholarly work 150 years ago. This may also be a reason for the general assumption that language use has profoundly changed.

There have been a number of other German research studies of email worth mentioning, among them Ziegler and Dürscheid's volume *Kommunikationsform E-Mail* ('*The Communication Form Email*') (2002), which consists of 13 articles concerning different aspects of email communication; Beutner's (2002) dissertation, *E-Mail Kommunikation*; essays by Christa Dürscheid on the topic (Dürscheid 2005, 2008); and finally Höflich and Gebhardt's edited volume *Vermittlungskulturen im Wandel: Brief, E-mail, SMS* ('*Communication Culture in Change: Letters, Email, SMS*') (2003). The research on email seems to have reached a certain saturation point now – it appears that further studies will focus rather on new CMC services such as Twitter and social network sites.

3. Features of email communication

Identifying language use that is typical for email communication proves to be difficult “simply because the vast diversity of settings and purposes of [its] use outweigh any common linguistic features” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 420). Nonetheless, the following sections attempt to outline the nature of email and its characteristics. Section 3.1 discusses the terms “emailism” and “Netspeak”. With structural features at its core, section 3.2 focuses on the graphical, lexical, and grammatical levels of emails, while the pragmatic features in terms of email dialogues and the relation between interactants is addressed in section 3.3.

3.1. “Emailism” and “Netspeak”

Two new terms have been coined in the context of email and computer-mediated communication respectively, these being “emailism” and “Netspeak”. The term “emailism” was coined by Petrie (1999: 26), who lists nine types of emailisms, namely trailing dots, capitalisation, quoting back the previous email, excessive use of exclamation marks or question marks, email abbreviations, lack of conventional punctuation, non-standard spelling, use of non-alphanumeric characters, and the use of smileys. Some of these features are graphostylistic strategies (e.g., excessive use of exclamation and question marks), others are a matter of the dialogical nature of emails (e.g., quoting back the previous email, see section 3.3). The term “emailism” has not actually caught on, but it is still worth mentioning because it shows the urge of researchers to conceptualise the nature of email in a general term in order to illuminate the concept more clearly. Similarly, Crystal (2001) has come up with the term “Netspeak”, by which he refers to CMC in general terms, including email. Typical Netspeak features in the context of email are various types of abbreviation, the tendency to use all lower case, new spelling conventions including all sorts of non-standard spellings, the rather minimalistic use of punctuation, which might even be completely absent in email exchanges, or else unusual combinations of punctuation marks (Crystal 2001: 134–138). Meanwhile, the term “Netspeak” has become a popular term in discourse about CMC; it has already made its way into the *Urban Dictionary* and has been referred to in various articles and essays.

The terms “emailism” and “Netspeak” are both attempts to define email and, more precisely, its linguistic features. They suggest that the language of email is a new, previously unknown language with unique features, thus deserving its own term. It is questionable, however, whether email is indeed as new a phenomenon as is commonly claimed. If we consider what Petrie and Crystal subsume under their terms, we realise that most of these characteristics are not actually new – a fact which, as mentioned above, was clearly shown by Elspaß’s (2002) corpus of private letters dating back to the late 19th century. Undisputedly, the possibility for an addressee to read a message received immediately after its composition can be re-

garded as a historical quantum leap in communication, and in this respect, the email setting is a new phenomenon: It enables near-real-time written communication. Yet apart from the technical aspect, it is doubtful whether one can consider email as something completely new, i.e., as a form of communication that is wholly different from any other communication form.

3.2. Structural features

Various features are claimed to be typical of email; these include forms of lexical abbreviation (e.g., *cu* 'see you') and syntactic reduction (e.g., *Exams over?*), non-standard punctuation, and emulated prosody. As mentioned in Crystal (2001: 136), for instance, there is a significant tendency to use lower-case spelling where capital letters would be the rule. Similarly, Thurlow (2001: 288) finds that people make "minimal to no use of capitalisation" in CMC, and so even though the whole message is not necessarily in lower-case letters, there is a considerable tendency to employ lower case. The reason why people neglect capital letters is that they can reduce typing effort and do not have to think about the correct upper-case and lower-case spelling. It is easier and more efficient to go with the lower-case default mentality. Another economic feature is lexical reduction. Crystal (2001: 134) explains that "[a]cronyms are so common that they regularly receive critical comments" and points out that they "are no longer restricted to words or short phrases, but can be sentence-length: *AYSOS* ['Are you stupid or something?'], *CID* ['Consider it done'], *GTG* ['Got to go'], *WDYS* ['What did you say?']". Yet these multi-word sentences are not as widespread as other lexical reductions such as homophones, consonant spellings, the omission of apostrophes, and ad hoc abbreviations. Letter and number homophones are comparably frequent. Rather frequent is the letter homophone *u* for the pronoun 'you'. Other homophones are *c* for 'see', *r* for 'are', *2* for 'to/too/two', and *4* for 'four/for'. Another common way to shorten words is consonant spelling (Frehner 2008): Words are spelled without their vowels, so that *from* becomes *frm*, *can* becomes *cn*, and *would* becomes *wld*. Apostrophes have also largely become the victim of efficiency in email correspondence and may be omitted. (For further discussion of the micro-linguistic structural features of CMC, see the chapter by Bieswanger in this volume.)

Frehner (2008: 63–69) shows that shortenings not only take place on the lexical level, but also on the syntactic level. Subject deletions are among the most frequent syntactic omissions; they may co-occur with auxiliary verb deletions or simply on their own. In German, it is usually the first person singular pronoun which is omitted (e.g., *Bin spät dran*, 'am late'). Copula deletion and omitted articles and conjunctions (e.g., *Exams over?*) are further means of economy, and the same applies to omitted punctuation marks. Despite this recognisable tendency to economise the language of emails, one feature does not serve economy at all, this being emulated prosody: To add extra emphasis or to emulate prosody, letters of a word

can be repeated or capitalised, and whole words can be reduplicated or else be put between asterisks or underlined spaces. The creative use of punctuation may also add emphasis or indicate loudness, silence, rising intonation, or even emotion.

Another typical email feature is the so-called thread. In email, a thread is a technical feature, being automatically generated by the mailing programme once the user replies to a received message by pressing the reply button.⁴ Nevertheless, such a thread still has a certain influence on the pragmatic level of emailing (see section 3.3). It consists of all the sent and received messages on a topic that was named and inserted into the subject line by the sender of the initial message. It is thus the subject line which creates a tie among these messages and establishes some text-external coherence. Having older messages included in one's answer allows the respondent to refer to some previously mentioned issue by, for instance, some anaphoric pronoun only (e.g., *Oooh D, **that's** not on our agenda for a while you know, worth trying though [...]*). In this way, a quasi-dialogue is performed (cf. Severinson Eklundh 2010), and for this reason, it is also justified to consider email as a target of discourse analysis.

Apart from this, there are qualitatively no new features that were not familiar to us before the advent of email. What seems to have changed is their quantity. While each of the linguistic characteristics described above had been present before email became popular, there are now more of these elements at once. Smiling faces, for instance, have been around since 1963 when Harvey Ball, a graphic artist, invented the yellow smiley face upon being given the task by the State Mutual Life Assurance Company "to design a logo that would uplift its employees after a company merger had hurt company morale [...]. Thinking about what would inspire employees to smile, Harvey decided the most simple and direct symbol would be a smile itself and that is what he drew" (Cates 2003: n.p.). Abbreviations have also been around for many decades, and emulated prosody is very similar to what can be found in comics, where the same or similar features exist. As for the lack of conventional punctuation marks, even this feature is not new: Telegrams, for instance, used to have an unusual typeface, often lacking any punctuation marks. What computer language has certainly encouraged is the great variety of abbreviations – just as it has led to a huge variety of smileys – but in the end, the way in which words are abbreviated is not new from a qualitative perspective; quite on the contrary, it is a quantitative change.

3.3. Pragmatic features

Regarding the history of CMC research, Androutsopoulos (2006: 421) states that "a shift of focus from medium-related to user-related patterns of language use" has taken place. Similarly, the medium-centred email perspective has given way to a user-centred one focusing on the pragmatic level of email communication. One of the major pragmatic effects caused by email is evident in email dialogues. Thanks

to the Internet, it is possible to exchange messages in the written mode in an almost synchronous way if two people are at the computer at the same time. This has led to some new behaviour in written communication, mainly concerning greeting and farewell formulas (Waldvogel 2007), as well as the way in which people quote back a previous message: The faster a reply follows a message, the more similarities it bears to a turn in an oral dialogue. If a person responds to an email quickly, they will often just add their new information to what has been communicated before without explicitly naming the reference object or addressing the recipient anew.

Whereas it is a typical characteristic of a non-electronic letter to contain a greeting and some form of farewell formula, these features are not always present in emails.⁵ Emails may or may not have a greeting and may begin in an elliptical way, not necessarily mentioning the reference object, but simply adding to what has been communicated before. As the reference object is usually present in the subject line, the receiver knows what the message is about so that no information concerning the subject matter is needed. In paper-based letters, subject lines are only common in formal letters, i.e., business letters, and in memoranda (cf. Cho 2010; Orlikowski and Yates 1993), while there is usually no subject line in informal letters. This is different in emails: A blank line invites the sender to mention a subject regardless of the degree of formality. In fact, should the senders not fill in this line, they will usually be asked by the email system if a subject should be added. The reason why there is not always a greeting can be explained when we consider the to-and-fro of email dialogues that are similar to oral dialogues. The more quickly the emails are exchanged, the more they can be compared to oral dialogues and the less probable it is that there will be greeting formulas. They are not needed, just as they are not necessary in turns of an oral dialogue. The tendency is that the greater the time span between two messages, the more information is required; the shorter the time span, the more information can be assumed to be available from the context of the interaction. The absence of greeting formulas is not something that is new to email; memoranda do not usually include greeting formulas either. They were also often omitted in telegram messages: In order to save costs, people tried to cut out words when composing telegrams, and greeting formulas happened to be omitted – as well as farewell formulas, at times.

Emoticons are another of the features associated with email. Focusing merely on the term, which is a blend of “emotion” and “icon”, one may assume that emoticons add emotion to what has been written. Yet they also indicate the illocutionary force of the utterance with which they are associated, as Dresner and Herring (2010) point out. Accordingly, an emoticon may be used to downgrade a complaint to a simple assertion or to indicate humour or irony. There exists a great variety of emoticons, ranging from the original happy smiley :-)) and sad smiley :-(to more complex ones such as the smiley with its tongue sticking out :-P or the chef smiley C=:). Popular as they might be, emoticons do not appear as often in emails as is

commonly believed. Frehner's empirical study (2008) reveals that in a corpus consisting of 342 emails, there were only 3.16 occurrences of smileys per 1,000 words, whereas in a corpus of 983 single (fewer than 160 signs) and linked (more than 160 signs) text messages (SMS), emoticons appear 4.88 and 3.98 times per 1,000 words, respectively. No studies so far have explained why emoticons are not so frequent in emails, especially since they are undoubtedly native to CMC. Androutsopoulos (2006: 425) reports on "emoticons being more often used by females in Witmer and Katzman (1997), and by teenage males in Huffaker and Calvert (2005)". Beutner (2002: 78), in contrast, assumes that it is mainly newbies (i.e., inexperienced users) who make use of emoticons. This would imply that newbies (i.e., inexperienced users) first overuse emoticons and then, the more accustomed they get to the communication mode, the less they use them to modify their statements.

At this point, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the "etiquette" of email, because it reveals characteristic pragmatic features compared to the etiquette of other CMC modes, on the one hand, and to that of offline (written) communication, on the other hand. We do not imagine that people are actually aware of these guidelines, but their regulations nevertheless allow for conclusions about everyday email use. If email etiquette tells us, for instance, to avoid certain elements (e.g., the use of words spelled in all capitals), we can deduce that these have already become a feature of emails. Another common piece of advice is to not send an email when feeling emotional. As emails are easily composed and dispatched, email writers are likely to send messages written in the heat of the moment – messages that would never have been written or sent if they had to be taken to the post office.⁶ The first set of guidelines, titled "Towards an ethics and etiquette for electronic mail", dates from 1985 and is still available. The authors, Norman Shapiro and Robert Anderson, based their recommendations on personal observations of inappropriate and counterproductive uses of email. Since then, numerous guidelines have been composed dealing with email use. They can be found on the Internet, codified in FAQ documents or Netiquette guidelines, but also in print newspaper articles and in print books on Netiquette. Indirectly, these guidelines postulate the cooperative principle and Grice's (1975) four conversational maxims: the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. Some guidelines recommend, for instance, not sending emails with large attachments – a rule that concerns the maxim of quantity ("Do not make your information more informative than is required"). However, there is a difference between the theoretical status of Grice's conversational maxims and the status of the Netiquette guidelines: The maxims describe presumptions about utterances, i.e., they express the ideal ways in which cooperative interactants should communicate. The guidelines, in contrast, have a strong prescriptive character.

The following instruction concerning the feature of quoting in emails is based on the maxims of relevance and quantity (e.g., say things related to the current topic of the conversation; do not say more than is needed): "Only quote the needed parts (deleting the remainder) and reply directly after the item you wish to respond

to” (Johns 1996: n.p.). The maxim of manner is reflected in the following advice: “Please remember that you are sending a text-based communication to possible strangers. They may not know your sarcasm or witty sense of humor like your family and close friends do” (Johns 1996: n.p.). Other recommendations concern non-verbal behaviour in CMC. For example, people are advised not to forward an email without the agreement of the sender, send a carbon copy to several recipients in which everybody’s address is indicated, or send a large attachment file without announcing it beforehand.⁷ These rules clearly demonstrate that there are socio-cultural factors associated with interaction in CMC that have to be taken into consideration.

4. Theoretical approaches

This section focuses on two approaches that have already been mentioned, these being Koch and Oesterreicher’s (1994) orality-literacy model,⁸ which was developed in the 1980s before the rise of email communication, and Herring’s (2001, 2007) discourse approach to CMC. Koch and Oesterreicher distinguish between medium and conception, explaining that while a piece of writing can be written from a medial perspective, the same piece of writing can be oral from a conceptual perspective and vice versa. While there is a dichotomy within the medial dimension (language is either phonic or graphic), there is a continuum within the conceptual dimension (see also Biber 1988). The two poles of the continuum are called “language of immediacy” (which is conceptually oral) and “language of distance” (which is conceptually written). The language of immediacy is typically associated with private settings (see Landert and Jucker 2011) in which there is a high degree of familiarity as well as a lack of emotional distance between the interactants; it is further set in a dialogic situation and characterised by unplanned discourse, while the opposite is true of the language of distance. Note that labelling these poles as “oral” and “written” may be misleading even if they are qualified by the attribute “conceptually”. One must always keep in mind that this dimension is logically independent of the medial dimension, although there might be a prototypical correspondence between the two. Figure 1 illustrates the model.

In the prototypical case, there is a correspondence between the choice of linguistic features and the medial dimension. This means that written language is more typically used in situations of distance and when a formal style is required. A legal text, for instance, is classified as written both from a conceptual and a medial perspective (position A), while private talk within one’s family or among friends is spoken and tends to use an informal style (position B). At the same time, some correspondences do not follow this regularity and must be located somewhere between the conceptual and the medial dimension. Accordingly, a church sermon is spoken, but tends to be stylistically formal, whereas a greeting postcard is written,

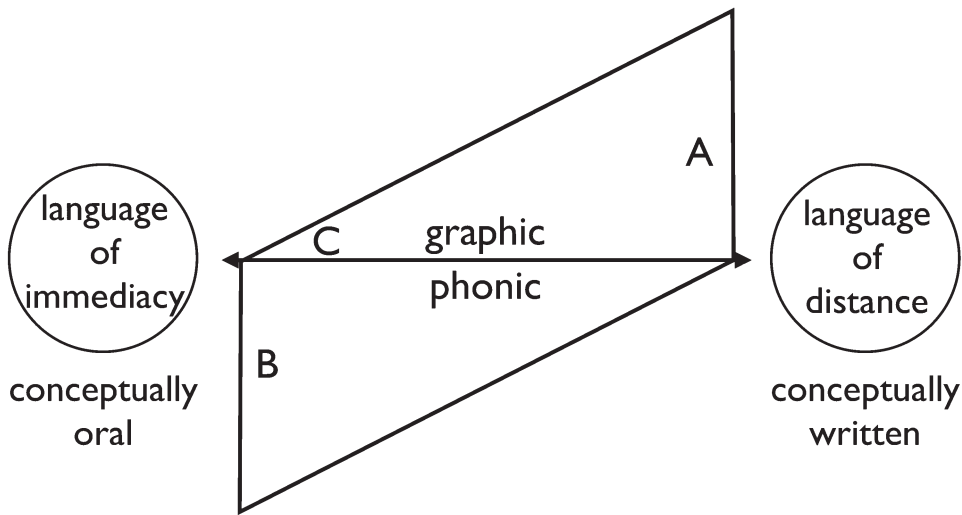


Figure 1. Koch and Oesterreicher's model; A= legal text, B = private talk, C= private email

but is of a more colloquial style. For this reason, the model is highly interesting for CMC research: In CMC, we are often faced with texts that do not meet our expectations concerning the relationship between medium and conception. Private emails, for instance, are written from the medial point of view, but may be situated next to the immediacy pole from the conceptual point of view (position C).

It is impossible to generalise about where email communication is located along the conceptual continuum due to the fact that a wide range of text types is realised in emails, each of them being associated with its own characteristic linguistic features. A business email, for instance, is usually less conceptually oral than a private email to a friend. This means that the model is suitable for the classification of email (or other) text types, but not for the classification of communication modes as a whole. However, the approach provides a precise terminology for CMC research, enabling researchers to describe a message's closeness to spoken or written language. When Baron (2000: 258) states that "[t]he line between spoken and written language continues to fade in America", she is referring to the conceptual dimension only. Within the medial dimension, the line cannot fade – despite the fact that on a screen, for instance, phonic and graphic signs may be combined. Email is not speech; email is exclusively text-based. There may be oral features, but these features are situated on the conceptual level and not on the medial one.

All in all, Koch and Oesterreicher's model is a suitable approach to situate written interactions such as business and private email messages along the continuum of communicative immediacy and communicative distance. However, it

does not offer a tool to analyse the context in which the interactions are embedded. To analyse dialogical situations, it is useful to consider the computer-mediated discourse analysis approach (CMDA) presented by Herring (2001). Research studies that are situated within this frame focus on communication purposes, situational factors (such as one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many communication), and the role of demographics (e.g., social class, race, and ethnicity). Indeed, it does make a difference whether an email is sent in a one-to-many-communication system (e.g., within a newsgroup) or in a one-to-one-communication system, within a business (formal) or private (informal) context. All these factors must be taken into consideration. Herring (2007) presented a classification scheme that brings together the relevant aspects of the technical and the social contexts that influence discourse usage in CMC (see section 2). In this article, she clearly points out that two main dimensions, medium and situation, jointly influence language use. Among the medium dimensions, one factor that conditions CMC is one-way or two-way message transmission, and another is synchronicity of participation (Herring 2007). Concerning the latter, it is useful to check the degree of (a-)synchronicity of a communication mode because this may influence language use. In fact, there is a continuum between asynchronous computer-mediated discourse (CMD), which occupies a position closer to writing (i.e., conceptually written in Koch and Oesterreicher's terms), and synchronous CMD, which occupies a position closer to speaking (i.e., conceptually oral). However, this factor does not only depend on the medium, it also depends on the situation, i.e., the interactants' use of the medium (Androutsopoulos 2007). The more synchronous the communication is (i.e., the shorter the delay between messages), the more likely it is to be conceptually oral.

5. Outlook: Email in competition with newer CMC services

The future of email research is closely linked to the future of email communication itself. Although the first email message was sent as early as 1971 (Bryant 2011), email did not become a widely used means of communication by the public until towards the end of the 20th century, at which time it quickly advanced to become the most frequently used Internet application. Until recently, figures for email usage have risen consistently ever since email became available to the general public in the early 1990s. Yet it seems that the quick rise in email usage might be followed by an equally quick fall: Newer and more synchronous services such as the various forms of Instant Messaging,⁹ as well as the numerous social network sites among which Facebook and Twitter are the most popular, have started to compete with email. According to a study in the U.S. by *compete.com*, Facebook is currently the most visited social network site, with 700,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors in November 2011.¹⁰ Compared to email, social network sites are more personal because one can read the profiles of the addressees, check their status

updates (see Lee 2011), flip through their photo albums, and learn about their personal lives. In other words, they provide many features other than just email addresses and messages through which users can represent themselves.

Social network sites have another advantage in comparison to email: As is generally known, one of the major problems with email is the amount of spam (or unsolicited messages) that is sent to email accounts. According to *Pingdom*, a service provider that checks the availability of online services for major companies, spam accounted for 89.1 % of all email traffic in 2010.¹¹ Similar problems do not (yet) exist with Instant Messaging services or with social network sites, which makes these services even more popular. Accordingly, a telephone survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project as early as 2005 stated that “email may be at the beginning of a slow decline as online teens begin to express a preference for instant messaging” (Lenhart, Hitlin, and Madden 2005: 5). In a newer Pew Internet Project study, a 9th grade boy is quoted as saying: “[You go to MySpace¹²] when all of your friends have gone to MySpace and they aren’t emailing anymore” (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, and Macgill 2008: 61). The figures presented in the report show a clear tendency: “Email remains the least popular choice for daily communication: [J]ust 16 % of teens send emails to their friends on a daily basis” (Lenhart et al. 2008: 53). It may be assumed that at the time of this writing, the shift is even more pronounced: Email is no longer the privileged mode of online communication among young people.

However, another point must be taken into consideration that partly speaks in favour of the future of emailing: While email has been linked to stationary computers for a long time, technology trends are towards increasing mobility. Especially with the diffusion of Apple’s iPhone and its high-speed data connection, emails can be received almost as easily as text messages, which may lead to a new boost in email figures. Be that as it may, information technology experts regard email as an “old-fashioned” way of communication, and some people predict that email use will die off. Lorenz (2007), for instance, published an article on “The death of e-mail” in which he summarised the decline of email as follows: “Those of us older than 25 can’t imagine a life without e-mail. For the Facebook generation, it’s hard to imagine a life of only e-mail [...]. As mobile phones and sites like Twitter and Facebook have become more popular, those old Yahoo! and Hotmail accounts increasingly lie dormant” (n.p.).

These reports seem to predict doom for email communication. Yet they mainly concern private email communication. It is possible that the situation is different in the business sector, where traditional email communication serves important functions and may persist. There are also email-based systems such as web forums and discussion lists that are active at present and might continue to be used. It can be concluded that email research will have a future as long as email as a communication mode finds its niches.

Notes

1. For further details about this kind of “multi-party interaction” see Skovholt and Svennevig (2006).
2. Due to limitations of space, this chapter focuses on these two languages only.
3. In contrast to one-way systems, there exist only a few two-way systems in the written mode (Google Wave, for instance, offered real time communication, but Google discontinued its development in 2010, only one year after it was released). Yet it is important to mention this distinction, as – in contrast to Anglophone studies – there is a general agreement among the German research community that online chat is *not* synchronous. Some consider it “quasi-synchronous” (e.g., Dürscheid 2004: 154), while others (e.g., Beißwenger 2007: 37) distinguish between simultaneity (i.e., the participants are able to see the message as it is produced) and synchronicity (i.e., sender and addressee are logged in at the same time).
4. This is not the case for online chat, however. On cross-turn coherence in chat, see the chapters in this volume by Herring and Markman.
5. For an empirical study on this issue (although only public emails are analysed), see Herring (1996b).
6. It would be interesting to investigate whether the sociocultural factors that underlie these rules are universal or whether they vary across cultures.
7. As the speed of data transfer has increasingly become faster in recent years and people often have high speed Internet connections, this rule may no longer be relevant. Even large data files can be downloaded quickly and easily these days.
8. This is our translation from the German “Mündlichkeits-/Schriftlichkeitsmodell”.
9. In contrast to email, Instant Messaging is a more synchronous communication mode: The interlocutors have to be online at the same time to receive each other’s messages.
10. <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites> [accessed 4/30/2012]
11. <http://royal.pingdom.com/2011/01/12/internet-2010-in-numbers/> [accessed 11/14/2011]
12. Until Facebook took over in popularity several years ago, MySpace had been the most popular social network site.

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